

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 001777

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PBTS](#) [KUNC](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#) [WOMEN](#) [POLITICAL](#) [RIGHTS](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAQ](#) [RELATIONS](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER: PROGRESS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS, IRAN  
TRAVEL AVERTS CRISIS, AND IRAQI SECURITY CONCERNS

REF: A. KUWAIT 1633

[B](#). KUWAIT 1600

[C](#). KUWAIT 1557

[D](#). KUWAIT 1131

[E](#). KUWAIT 1089

[F](#). KUWAIT 943

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During an April 27 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah told the Ambassador that he believes that the GOK has enough votes to pass the women's rights bill for Municipal Council elections on May 2 and that once women are registered to vote at the municipal level, success on the issue of women's national political rights would be "sealed." The Foreign Minister also discussed his recent trip to Iran describing it as a successful effort to prevent Iran from unilaterally drilling in a disputed off-shore gas field (refs E and F). He said President Khatami, who has accepted an invitation to visit Kuwait, has committed to resolving this issue during his time as president. Shaykh Dr. Mohammed also raised concerns about the Iraqi insurgency and Iraqi military training and informed the Ambassador that the USD 78 million of frozen Iraqi assets to be transferred to the Development Fund for Iraq is still with Kuwait's UN Mission but opined that at least a portion could be passed to the GOI now (ref C). Regarding support for the Palestinians he stated that Kuwait announced the release of USD 40 million during the Algiers summit and is expecting Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to visit Kuwait (ref D). Shaykh Dr. Mohammed mentioned an interest in traveling to Washington during May in advance of Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah's anticipated visit. End Summary.

Women's Rights Will Not Be Held Hostage By MPs' Tricks

2.(C) The Foreign Minister said the GOK is taking the issue of women's political rights "one step at a time." He believes the GOK has successfully separated the religious argument from the political one. He remarked that no one can hide behind an obscure fatwa to oppose women's rights. He said that what is important is to get women voters registered, because once they register, "the debate will change overnight."

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding the second reading of the recently passed bill granting women political rights at the Municipal Council level, which will take place on May 2, he said that "some MPs are playing tricks with us (refs A and B)." He seemed concerned that the Islamic Bloc would raise the issue of voting rights for police and military personnel to scuttle the current bill and the effort to grant women political rights. (Note: Currently Kuwaiti police and military personnel can neither vote in national elections nor run for political office. Many Islamists believe it would be an injustice if Kuwaiti women gained the right to vote while many adult male Kuwaitis remain legally prohibited from doing so. End Note.) The Foreign Minister also suspected that some MPs may add to the existing bill the controversial issue of electoral redistricting to further reduce chances of support for the women's rights legislation. One such proposal would allow citizens to vote only in the district in which they reside, as indicated on the national ID card. He likened this approach to redistricting without going through the legislative process. Remarking that it was a very contested issue, he said that some people currently "shift" every election to the district of those they wish to support. The Foreign Minister said the GOK is willing to discuss all of these additional issues but that it would not be held hostage by them. He said he is confident that the GOK position has enough votes to pass the legislation.

[1](#)4. (C) Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said the GOK intention is to start registering women to vote as soon as the legislation passes. He explained that the registration process for the Municipal Council is the same as that for national Parliamentary elections. He stated that the issue would be "sealed" if the municipal bill passed.

[1](#)5. (C) He further outlined two possible GOK strategies to secure women's political rights at the national level. The

first scenario is for the GOK to introduce a bill calling for women's national political rights during the Municipal Council elections. He said that no one would stand up and say women cannot vote in Parliamentary elections while they are queuing up to cast ballots in municipal elections. Another option is to dissolve Parliament once women are registered to vote and then call new Parliamentary elections allowing all registered women the right to vote and run as candidates.

16. (C) The Foreign Minister remarked that most in the GOK and Parliament know that the Municipal Council bill is a prelude to Parliamentary voting rights for women. He also said that women's political rights introduces an element of uncertainty for most MPs. He remarked that it is a politically courageous position for an MP to support the measure because many will be voting against the will of their constituents, especially MPs in rural areas, but also some liberal urban MPs.

#### Iran Drilling Threat Prompts FM's Trip -----

17. (C) The Minister frankly admitted to recent problems with Iran. He said that he recently visited Iran to settle a dispute over the contested continental shelf, a disagreement that he mentioned has been ongoing since 1968. (Note: The Foreign Minister visited Iran April 20-22. End Note.) He explained that discussions centered on the off-shore Al-Durra gas field of which about ten percent is in dispute. He said that the Iranians, in 1997, moved into the disputed region and began drilling into the northern tip of the gas field, 90 percent of which he stated is squarely in Kuwaiti territory.

18. (C) He explained that he was "dispatched" to Iran because Iran in March declared its intent to begin re-drilling in the disputed region. He said the two sides managed to agree to three items: that a disputed area exists, that there will be no unilateral activity in the disputed area, and that a technical committee should be formed to resolve the dispute. He said the reaction from the Iranian government to his trip was positive and that President Khatami told him that he wants to finalize the issue during his time as president. The Foreign Minister was hopeful but not overly optimistic that President Khatami would make efforts to resolve the gas field dispute. President Khatami accepted a GOK invitation to visit Kuwait but no date has been arranged for travel.

19. (C) The FM also said that he conveyed to President Khatami Kuwaiti concerns about the potential environmental consequences of the Iranian nuclear plant. He stated that he told President Khatami that Iran was building the Bushehr nuclear reactor on unstable territory that was subject to earthquakes and that Kuwait's concern wasn't just about a possible Iranian nuclear weapons program but that the reactor in question was located in proximity to Kuwait. According to Shaykh Dr. Mohammed, President Khatami responded that the Germans chose the site years ago and that the technology being employed is not of the "Chernobyl type" and includes the latest Russian safeguards.

#### Iraqi Insurgency And Military Training Levels Concern FM -----

10. (C) The Foreign Minister said he was troubled to read a U.S. military statement that the level of insurgents operating in Iraq is unchanged from last year. Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said because there has been no change, it must be assumed that a "professional" group is operating in Iraq and not just Abu Musab Al-Zargawi's group. He also inquired about the recent downing of a U.S. helicopter in Iraq and whether the Iraqi militants had acquired a new military capability. The Ambassador assured the Foreign Minister that the attack did not appear to represent an increased insurgent military capability.

11. (C) The Foreign Minister also inquired about the status of Iraqi Army training and whether it was behind schedule because he had heard that Shi'as and Kurds were trying to move their own militias into the Sunni triangle to quell unrest. The Ambassador explained that training is progressing but problems such as a dearth of mid-level leadership and significant attempts by insurgents to infiltrate the military continued to hamper efforts. The Ambassador also made clear that the U.S. did not wish to see security units segregated by ethnic group, and were working to avoid this.

12. (C) Shaykh Dr. Mohammed expressed his appreciation for the U.S. acceptance of the fuel proposal. He remarked that the next step was to begin the legal procedures with KPC and provide auditors with required information.

#### Development Fund Money Tied Up In Legal Department -----

13. (C) The Foreign Minister said that Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari inquired about the USD 78 million of frozen Iraqi assets to be transferred to the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI) (ref C). Shaykh Dr. Mohammed said the MFA Legal Department was trying to determine whether these were active claims and that by law, his "hands are tied" because the claim must be adjudicated before the GOK could release the funds to Iraq. The FM offered to provide a legal explanation to the Iraqis on this issue. He also talked about the idea of releasing a portion of the money before the issue of pending claims is fully resolved. The Ambassador urged prompt resolution of the matter.

Support To The Palestinians  
-----

14. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's question about support for the Palestinians, the Foreign Minister remarked that the GOK announced the transfer of USD 40 million to the Palestinians during the Algiers summit in late March and pointed out that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas accepted an invitation to visit Kuwait but that they were still waiting on a date (ref D). He then expressed frustration that Israel had not been helpful as of late. He said that Prime Minister Sharon was playing politics with humanitarian issues and raised concerns stemming from a press report that Israel is employing high-powered x-ray machines at checkpoints. He said the article claimed that the machines were the type used in hospitals and could cause overdoses of radiation and trigger miscarriages in pregnant women. He remarked that if the claims were true, something must be done.

FM To Visit Washington Ahead Of Shaykh Sabah  
-----

15. (C) The Foreign Minister expressed an interest in traveling to the U.S. in the second half of May, ahead of the desired Prime Minister's visit later in the summer. He said he would be in Brazil during that period and would like to stop in the U.S. to meet with the Secretary. The Ambassador encouraged the Foreign Minister to visit even if the Secretary were unavailable. He remarked that there are

SIPDIS

others in Washington who would also appreciate meeting with him. Calling him a very good friend of Kuwait, Shaykh Dr. Mohammed remarked that perhaps a meeting with the Vice President would be useful. He added that the U.S. and Kuwait still need to address long-term issues such as a free-trade agreement (FTA), dwindling numbers of Kuwaiti students to U.S. universities, and visa issues.

16. (C) Shaykh Dr. Mohammed mentioned that the GCC wanted to secure a multilateral FTA but that it was the U.S. that insisted on bilateral FTA agreements. He mentioned that the rest of the GCC did not appreciate the Saudi position vis-a-vis the U.S. FTA talks with Bahrain. The Foreign Minister said he was glad to see the Saudis moving forward on joining the WTO.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Kuwait's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

You can also access this site through the  
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website  
\*\*\*\*\*

LEBARON